Annotated Image

Mirza Ali ibn Zeinolabedin Hamadani (19th Century A.D.)

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Following the European Renaissance and the emerging scientific revolution, communications with the West became a fundamental step in the development and modernization of many Eastern or Middle Eastern countries. In Persia (then called Iran) during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, the first group of students was sent to Europe to study medicine and surgery and then to return and serve the court and the country. Despite the uniqueness of this dispatch of students, which was initiated by Abbas Mirza, the crown prince of Fath Ali Shah, the knowledge transferred was insubstantial and did not influence the schools in Persia. This was perhaps because the students were not qualified for this purpose or perhaps there was little public interest in the correction of past misconceptions, and there may also have been a resistance to such reformation. No more than half a century later, Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir, the wise grand vizier of Naser Al-Din Shah Gajar, systematically and officially extended scientific communication with Europe by founding the first modern academy of science and technology in Persia, Dar Al-Fonoon (literally meaning House of Technology). During the same era, qualified students were dispatched to Europe, in particular to France, to study medicine, and Western professors were invited to accept the chairs at Dar al-Fonoon. Young physicians and scholars trained at traditional schools and those who based their knowledge upon millennium-old anatomical teachings encountered, and were amazed by, the perfection of anatomical literature and medical practices current in nineteenth-century Europe. Included among them was Mirza Ali ibn Zeinolabedin Hamadani (Figure 1), who on his return to Persia was renowned as “the Master of Physicians”. Unfortunately, little is known about the life of this early Iranian scholar in Europe.

Figure 1: Mirza Ali ibn Zeinolabedin Hamadani (19th century A.D.)

References